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Water Meter FAQs

On August 21st, the town offered to test up to 100 meters for accuracy to ensure a representative sample was tested. By the due date of August 26th, 62 people had submitted to have their meter tested, four of whom didn't have water service with the Town of Frederick. On September 9, 58 meters were taken to the City of Fort Collins to be tested for accuracy. When the Town received the test results back, they showed that 57 meters were running accurately, and one phase of a four phase test on a single meter was running fast at 0.3% above the acceptable threshold. We have provided an appropriate refund for this homeowner based on the amount of water they were being charged at 0.3% excess in the reading. This accounts for a total of 348 gallons or \$1.59 over a period of six months for this homeowner.

So what does this mean?

This means that a vast majority of the meters are running accurately. A water meter is a mechanical device with a series of internal gears. These gears move as water flows through the meter, recording your usage. This process is similar to how an automobile odometer records the miles as the tires rotate. All meters are factory calibrated to industry standards prior to being shipped. We currently have two residential models in our system: the SR11, which typically lasts 10 to 15 years, and the IPERL unit, which we are currently installing and have a 20-year accuracy warranty. After that time, they can begin to wear, allowing more water to flow through the meter than is actually recorded with the result being an underbilled customer.

What is the town's billing process?

The billing process begins with utility reads. This is an automated process using our billing and meter reading software. For the water utility, data containing the meter ID and the meter location is downloaded from our billing software onto a flash drive. The flash drive is then plugged into a laptop that is paired with an electronic reading device. The laptop is taken in a truck and is driven around slowly so that the reading device can register the reads. This registering of the reads occurs through a radio read frequency without human interaction. Once the reads have all registered, the data from the flash drive is imported into the billing software through a batch process. After the data upload is complete, error reports are generated, printed, and analyzed. The usage reports are also reviewed for abnormally high or low readings. Accounts that are showing abnormal usage are then reported to the Public Works staff and the meters are read manually using a handheld device. Once the manual read is complete and verified, that data is entered into the billing system and the bills are generated.

Built on What Matters.

What is the process when a reading comes back abnormally high or low?

As part of the meter reading process, every meter reading is reviewed on a monthly basis to see if it is abnormally high/low for that user. During the winter months the reads are compared against the previous months read. In the spring and summer months the read is compared to the same period the previous year since most people have similar watering patterns and behaviors. Customers that are flagged for abnormally high or low reads are then contacted on an individual basis for further investigation. We are happy to provide detailed customer usage history reports for anyone that requests them, which will give them their specific reads from month to month for the past three years. That way you can see that your usage is similar to the same month for the past few years. Many people do not realize how much water regular activities take. For example:

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Non-Water Saving Device</u>	<u>Water Saving Device</u>
Bath	Average 36 gallons	
Shower	5 gallons a minute	2 gallons a minute
Teeth Brushing	2 gallons per minute	1 gallon per minute
Washing Hands/Face	1 gallon	1/2 gallon
Shaving Face	2 gallons per minute	1 gallon per minute
Dishwasher	16 gallons per load	
Dishes by Hand	8 - 27 gallons	
Clothes washing	40 gallons	25 gallons
Toilet flush	3.5 - 7 gallons	2 gallons
½ inch hose	600 gallons an hour	

If I'm using the same amount of water I have in years past, why is my bill so much higher?

Staff looked at past water usage from the last three years, because the changes from a wet year to a dry year drastically affect usage. In almost every case, it was found that there had been previous usage as high as this year or there was something new such as landscaping or a "slip and slide" toy for the kids to enjoy during the hot dry months we had this summer.

The main reason the water bills are higher is that the Town increased water rates, effective May 1, 2015, in order to meet the current and future needs of the Town's water system. Another part of the increase was to encourage water conservation, with higher increases for the higher tiers of water users. The less water the customer uses, the smaller the increase. For example, the total bill for a use of 4,000 gallons per month will be \$32.73 (\$30.65 base rate (includes the first 3,000 gallons) + \$2.08 per additional 1,000 gallons), a \$5.33 total increase. However, someone who uses 30,000 gallons per month will see a \$36.81 increase as illustrated below.

Number of Gallons Used	Old Rate (per thousand gallons)	Amount Billed	New Rate (per thousand gallons)	Amount Billed
Base (includes 3,000 gallons)	\$ 25.80	\$ 25.80	\$ 30.65	\$ 30.65
Next 2,000	\$ 1.60	\$ 3.20	\$ 2.08	\$ 4.16
Next 10,000	\$ 2.20	\$ 22.00	\$ 2.86	\$ 28.60
Next 10,000	\$ 2.80	\$ 28.00	\$ 3.64	\$ 36.40
Next 5,000	\$ 4.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 5.20	\$ 26.00
Total Billed (30,000 gallons)		\$ 99.00		\$125.81

Even with this increase, Frederick is well within the average water rates for the area, as many providers have already enacted increases in order to account for the continuously rising costs of water in Colorado.

Then how do you explain the fact that it's affecting everyone in Town?

Based on the number of complaints we have received, less than 1.5% of the town's total population has shared concerns about their water bill. After discussing their bill with them and helping them break down their usage by talking about how much they are watering and brainstorming other activities that could cause their high usage, most of these people have realized that they are using more water than they thought they were and are now taking steps to conserve. We have compared our overall water system usage to previous years and to other water suppliers in the region. Frederick's usage this year is in line with previous years' usage and with these other water users.

Why didn't I ever hear about the water rate increase?

We're not sure, as we make every effort to communicate in every outlet we have available. It was in the April 2015 newsletter that comes with your utility bill, in our Frederick Flash weekly email, posted on our facebook and twitter accounts and is still on our website. Prior to that, it was on the agendas of the September 23, November 18th and December 9th Board Meetings in 2014, which are posted on our website, at Town Hall and the Post Office. You can also sign up to receive an email notification when a new agenda is posted online. If you aren't signed up to receive the weekly Frederick Flash or agenda notifications, you can do so at www.frederickco.gov/emailupdates.

Why didn't we get to vote on the water rate increase?

The Frederick Water Fund is an enterprise fund which means that it operates as a business and must cover its own costs by generating its own revenues. It receives no revenue from property tax, sales tax or other revenue source. It also means that money brought in by water service cannot be used for other town expenses, but only to maintain the water system and pay for the water it supplies. The strong demand for limited water supplies has dramatically driven increases in the cost of water which leads to the need for water rate increases. Frederick, like many water providers in the region, is faced with securing a dependable water supply that will serve the Town during extended droughts, prepare us to respond to potential impacts of climate change, and meet growing demands in the future. The Town of Frederick operates with a representative government which means that you elect representatives to make decisions relating to Town matters, such as water rates, for you. Rest

assured that these representatives, your Town Board of Trustees, do not make these decisions lightly and consider research and expert opinions prior to making a decision.

What can I do about my high water usage?

Water conservation tips can be found on the Town's website under the "I Want To" tab. Summer watering guidelines and links to many helpful resources are listed here. Town staff is also ready to help any customer check for a leak in their water service if water usage seems higher than can be explained. Staff meets with the homeowner to check for flow through the water meter when all uses inside and outside of the home are completely turned off. If water is still going through the meter (and low flows are registered by the meter) then the homeowner knows to look for a leaky toilet, sprinkler system, or other pipe to find the leak. There are water audit companies that can help determine areas where home or business owners can reduce their water usage.

Will the Town be testing any more meters since one was found to read fast?

No. The 0.3% overage is so negligible that we can definitively say that inaccurate meters are not the reason that some residents experienced higher bills. It was an effect of the weather patterns this year, combined with the water rate increase and the three additional days in the billing cycle.

If I still have concerns, can I get my meter tested to make sure it is running accurately?

Yes, however if it is found that your meter is running accurately, you will be required to pay for the testing costs. If it is shown to be inaccurate, the Town will pay for the test and reimburse you for the difference for the past six months if your meter is shown to be running high. If it is shown to be running low, you will not be charged for the difference, but your meter will be replaced. To request your meter for testing, please contact Public Works at 720.382.5800.